

## THE STORY OF CAROLINE CRACHAMI—THE “SICILIAN DWARF”

by

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IN THE FOURTH of the Donation Books kept by William Clift during the years 1800 to 1833, item 1217 under the date 7th June 1824 reads : “ The body of Miss, or Mademoiselle, Crachami, the Sicilian dwarf, who died on Friday last, 4th June. 22½ inches high, weighing, by guess, between five and six pounds. Aged near nine years ; born at Palermo (said to be born the day after the Battle of Waterloo, consequently the 19th of June 1815—making her, if true, nine years wanting 15 days).” The specimen is stated to have been presented by Sir Everard Home.

On Thursday, 10th June 1824, the following account appeared in *The Times* :—

### DEATH OF THE SICILIAN DWARF

This poor child had been for some time afflicted with a cough and the untoward changes in the weather during several days of last week had a visible effect on the general state of her health. On Thursday last she was exhibited as usual and received upwards of 200 visitors ; towards the evening a langour appeared to come over her and on the way from the exhibition room she expired. Miss Crachami, the name by which she was known, was the daughter of a musician ; she was born at Palermo, in Sicily, and, on account of her diminutive size, was considered a phenomenon. The Duchess of Parma, and a few distinguished persons, were allowed to see her, but she was not publicly exhibited until she was brought to England in the latter end of last summer, since which she has been exhibited at Oxford, Birmingham and Liverpool and of late in London ; and was unquestionably the most curious of all the dwarfish candidates for public favour that have visited this metropolis.

So far as can be ascertained, the details of her life are as follows. Her mother was an Italian woman who, with her husband, Fogel Crachami, was attached to the baggage column of the Duke of Wellington’s army in Flanders. She was then 20 years old and already had three children. During the third month of this pregnancy, while lying asleep in a tent, she was suddenly awakened and was bitten on the hand by a monkey that had taken refuge there from a violent storm. When the child was born six months later it weighed only one pound and measured seven inches in length. It was very delicate and difficult to rear. At some later period, the family went to reside in Ireland and the child, Caroline, developed consumption. It was not until the summer of 1823 that she was brought to England and exhibited publicly. In Volume V of his “ Lectures on Comparative Anatomy,” Everard Home states that he saw the child several times while it was alive and says that “ it could walk alone, but with no confidence. Its sight was very quick, much attracted by bright objects, delighted with everything that glittered, mightily pleased with fine clothes, had a shrill voice and spoke in a low tone ; had some taste

for music but could speak few words of English ; was very sensible of kindness and quickly recognised any person who had treated it kindly. The mother had had a fifth child in Ireland which, like her first three children, is naturally formed.”

A few more details can be added to the story from a report published in *The Times* on Tuesday, 15th June 1824. This states that on the previous day two men appeared before Mr. F. A. Roe, the presiding magistrate, at Marlborough Street to beg his assistance or advice. The name of one of these men was given as Lewis Fogel, a Sicilian by birth, who said that he was “the father of the extraordinary child, called the Sicilian Dwarf, that has lately been exhibited in London, and whose sudden and melancholy death has thrown himself and his wife, the child’s mother, into the greatest grief.” Mr. Fogel informed Mr. Roe that he was a resident of Dublin and was a member of the orchestra of the Theatre Royal there. Some months previously, an acquaintance of his, Dr. Gilligan, examined little Caroline and was of the opinion that her constitution was being impaired by the uncongenial climate. The doctor professed to take such a particular interest in the health and welfare of the child that he offered to take her, at his own expense, to England or even to the Continent to attempt to improve her condition, only desiring that the parents would agree to his exhibiting her. He maintained that his object in doing this “was not so much the gain likely to arise from it but that, as a man of science, he was anxious that such an extraordinary phenomenon should not be lost to the physiological world.” The parents consented to this arrangement and after some months of travel Dr. Gilligan arrived in London towards the end of May 1824 and took rooms in Duke Street, St. James’s. The child died less than a fortnight later and the parents learned the sad news through the medium of the newspapers, for Dr. Gilligan had not communicated with them since he left Dublin. Mr. Fogel at once set off for London and lost no time in finding the address in Duke Street which he discovered to be a lodging-house belonging to Mr. Dorlan, a tailor. This man informed the father that Dr. Gilligan had left the premises the day after the child’s death and had taken the remains with him. The doctor owed his landlord £25 for rent and the only things left belonging to the child were her bed and the clothes that Mr. Dorlan had made for her for the occasion of her presentation to the King. Mr. Fogel also learned that Dr. Gilligan had been heard to say that some members of the College of Surgeons who had seen the child had offered, if any misfortune should occur to cause its death, to give him £500 for the remains “for the purpose of dissection and the use of the College to put amongst their collection of extraordinary instances of the whims and freaks of Nature.”

After hearing the story, the magistrate recommended that Mr. Fogel should first approach the parish authorities to ascertain whether a coroner’s inquest had been held, which advice he apparently followed but could learn nothing. He then visited many private schools of anatomy and

hospitals where anatomy was taught and at Joshua Brookes's establishment in Great Marlborough Street he found that Dr. Gilligan had indeed offered the body for dissection for the sum of a hundred guineas, which proposal was refused. Finally, Fogel arrived at Sir Everard Home's house in Sackville Street. Sir Everard, not knowing the identity of the visitor, but learning his errand, said, "Oh, you have come from Gilligan about the dwarf. The surgeons have not yet held a meeting ; therefore I can't say what sum will be voted to him." On hearing, however, that his visitor was the father of the child, Sir Everard was astonished and explained his words. It appeared that about a week previously Gilligan, who was known to Sir Everard through whose influence it had been arranged that the prodigy should be presented to the King, called at the house with the body, which no doubt by this time was becoming somewhat of an embarrassment to the doctor, and offered to sell it. Sir Everard refused to purchase it but said that he would present it to the College of Surgeons and that maybe a sum of money would be granted to him by the authorities there. Gilligan agreed to this and left the child, saying that he was going out of town but would send a friend in a few days' time to hear what had been done in the matter. On hearing the story, Fogel, in great distress, begged to see the body and Sir Everard gave him a written permit for this and also, out of his own pocket, presented him with a note for £10. The father arrived at the College "almost breathless" and after seeing the remains was only with great difficulty persuaded to leave. The body must at that time have been completely dissected, for Clift began the task on Tuesday, 8th June. In his manuscript account of his findings, written on the following day, he mentions that the specimen was even then in a poor state. No further information seems to be available either about Lewis Fogel and his family or the elusive Dr. Gilligan.

Some of the details of Clift's report on the dissection of Caroline Crachami are of interest. There was not the slightest appearance of fat in any part of the body, except a very small quantity in the posterior part of the orbits. The stomach and intestinal canal were very large for so small a creature ; the liver was natural in form and size and healthy in appearance. The ductus cysticus, ductus hepaticus and ductus communis choledochus were nearly or quite the size of those of an adult and the inguinal and mesenteric glands were much enlarged. The lungs were almost entirely covered with whitish irregular spots and very much tuberculated throughout. The head was rather large for the body and firmer and denser than in a child. No fluid was found in the chest or abdomen.

The articulated skeleton, prepared by Clift, may now be seen in Room I of the Museum, next to that of Charles Byrne, the "Irish Giant." Its total height is  $19\frac{1}{3}$  inches. The skull is thin and the great fontanelle is unossified. Only the deciduous teeth are in place, of which the first upper molar has suffered decay on each side ; the canines are not fully erupted and all the teeth are small. X-ray studies recently carried out by

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Professor A. E. W. Miles have shown that the progress of development of the dentition has reached a stage comparable to that of a normal child of between two and three years of age. Ossification throughout is greatly delayed. The long bones possess hardly any curve and are narrowest at the middle of their shafts. Four ossific centres have been established in the sternum, one for the manubrium and three for the body of the bone. There are no centres for the tuberosities of the ischia, for the symphysis pubis or for the anterior inferior spines. The centres for the heads of the femora are small and there are none for the trochanters or for the patella. The general state of development of the skeleton is, therefore, approximately equal to that of a child during its second year but the height of the specimen is nearer that of the normal newborn infant.

Hastings Gilford made a special study of dwarfism and from the evidence afforded by the skeleton he considered that Caroline Crachami was affected by a general disorder of development resulting in what he termed “essential infantilism,” a condition that could not be accounted for by any of the known causes of dwarfism. In a paper on this subject printed in the Transactions of the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society of London in 1902 he states : “ This delay of growth and development is



Fig. 1. Painting of Caroline Crachami by Alfred Edward Chalon, R.A.

so evidently the main feature that I have suggested that the disease should receive a name which emphasises this fact. I have proposed that it should receive the name of Ateleiosis (Gr. 'Not arriving at perfection').” He apparently accepted without question the statement that the child was about nine years old. In his opinion, the disorder was prenatal in origin and was the result of a wide-spread developmental error.

Hastings Gilford's conclusions about the intelligence of the dwarf seem to be unjustified. The facial features are, he remarks, “eminently characterisitic of microcephalism. The nose is much too large in proportion to the face, and the mandible is too small, giving a ferretty or rat-like appearance to the countenance, such as is commonly seen among small-headed idiots.” He based this somewhat misleading statement on a

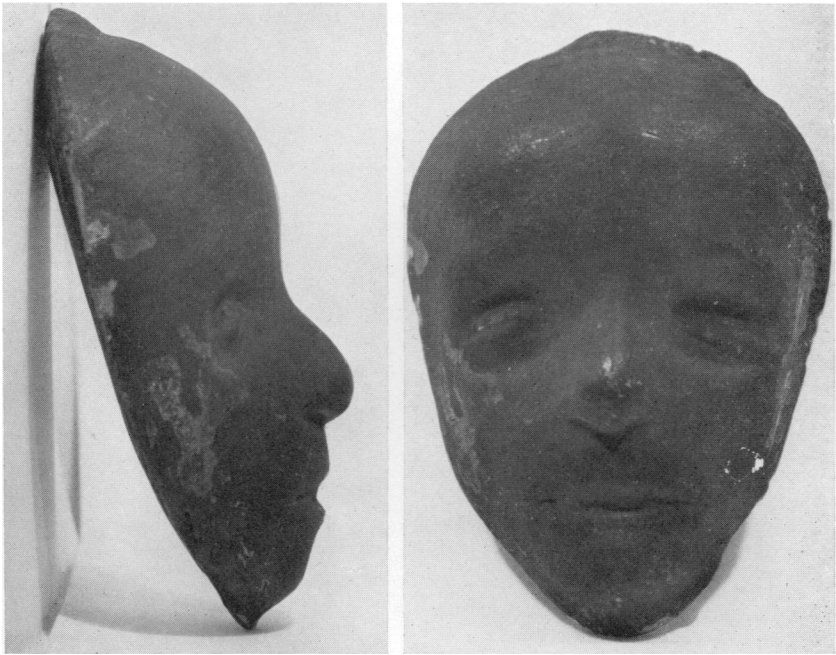


Fig. 2. Cast of the face of Caroline Crachami prepared a few days after death.

study of a portrait of Caroline Crachami in the possession of the College and reproduced here as Fig. 1. The artist was Alfred Edward Chalon, R.A., and Clift has noted in the Donation Book under the date 23rd January 1827 that he received “a small painting in oil of Miss Crachami—taken from recollection, two views, one standing, the other sitting—very little like.” A more reliable guide to the contours of the face is a mask prepared by Clift presumably when he received the body in 1824. The profile and full-face photograph of this, reproduced as Fig. 2, show that there was no undue proportion in the facial features.